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PALESTINE EXPLORED

Mount Zion

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They that trust in Jevovah are as Mount Zion,
Which shall not be moved: it abideth for ever.
The mountains are round about Jerusalem;
And Jehovah is round about His people,
Henceforth, even for evermore.

—Psalm 125:1-2

This article is from the book, ***Palestine Explored*** by Rev. James Neil.
Originally published by James Nisbet & Co., London. Printed in Great Britain **September 1881**.
The author acknowledges the aid of the Palestine Exploration Fund.

Comparisons, or similes, are sometimes used, not only to place a subject in a clearer light, which may be done by commonplace illustrations, but also to amplify and ennoble it. In this case sublime and splendid imagery must be summoned to serve. Perhaps one of the finest examples of this kind of lofty comparison is to be found in the illustration of the privileges of believers, drawn from the immutable strength and danger-defying situation of Mount Zion. It occurs in one of the Songs of Degrees. It is most probable that these "Songs of Ascendings," or "going up," were sung in chorus by the Hebrew caravans to cheer their yearly journeys to the City of the Great King. May we not well suppose that the eager pilgrim band burst into the 121st Psalm, the second of these songs, as they first caught sight of the heights of Jerusalem, singing —

Psalm 121:1

> "I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains;
> From whence shall my help come"?

Then it would seem that, halting near the gates to form the procession to the sanctuary, they pealed forth the hymn —
Psalm 122:1-2

> "I was glad when they said unto me,
> Let us go to the house of Jehovah.
> Our feet shall stand
> Within thy gates, O Jerusalem!"

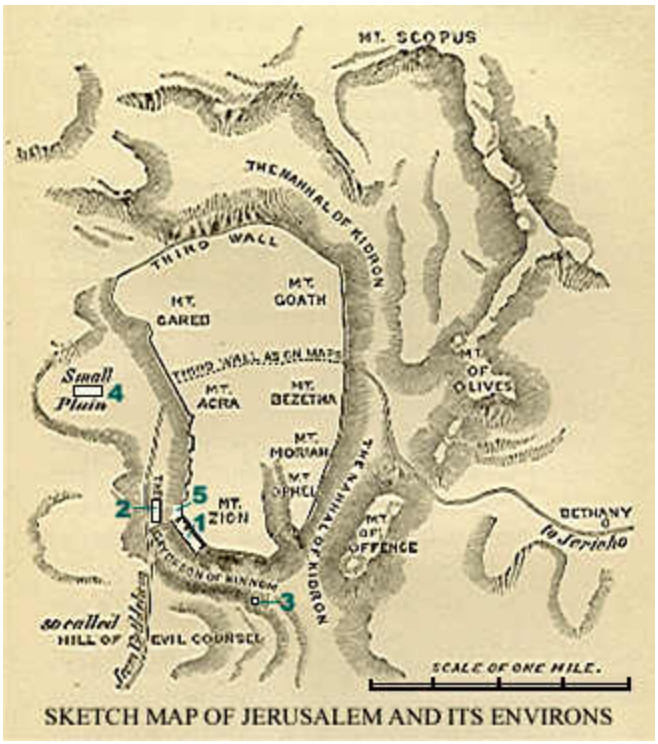
And at length arrived, as it would appear, within the Temple area, and looking forth on the sacred, never-to-be-forgotten scene, full of holy joy, they celebrated their mercies and privileges in the following words: —
Psalm 125:1-2

"They that trust in Jehovah are as Mount Zion,
Which shall not be moved: it abideth forever.
The mountains are round about Jerusalem:
And Jehovah is round about His people,
Henceforth, even for evermore."

Many who repeat these soul-stirring Hebrew verses form but a faint conception of their full force. But to those who are familiar with the natural features of the district they possess peculiar power and beauty. Mount Zion sometimes stands for the one hill on the south-western quarter of Jerusalem, now partly within and partly without the walls, which in ancient times, however, entirely encircled its summit; and sometimes for the whole site of the city, consisting of the seven hills on which it was situated, namely, Mount Zion, Mount Acra, Mount Ophel, Mount Moriah, Mount Gareb, and Mount Goath.1 In this latter sense, Mount Zion, as the largest, most anciently inhabited, and most important part of Jerusalem, stands, by a figure of speech, for the whole of the triple-walled metropolis of Palestine. Whether we confine it to the single mountain in question, or regard it as spoken of all the seven hills enclosed by the three walls of the ancient city, Mount Zion would convey to the mind of an Israelite a very grand representation. The mountains of Judah in this central part of the chain, where they rise to the height of over 2500 feet above the level of the sea, are composed on the surface, and to a great depth below, of tertiary limestone of four different kinds. There is a nummulitic limestone which has bands of flint and fossils, called in Arabic *Kacooley*; a beautifully white limestone which goes by the name of *Malakey*, much used for ornamental stone work; an exceedingly hard silicious chalk, also with bands of flints called *Mizzey*; and lastly, a pink and white stratat of indurated chalk, also exceedingly hard, and taking a fine polish, known as the "*Santa Croce*" marble. The *Kacooley* and *Malakey* rocks are comparatively soft when first quarried at any depth below the ground, but the *Malakey*, wherever it rises to the surface or is exposed to the air, gradually and constantly hardens, which renders it a very valuable stone for building purposes, as I know from actual experience of its use. The *Malakey*, however, in the hills which form the site of the Holy City, generally underlies the marble-like *Mizzey*, or silicious indurated chalk, which exceedingly hard stone forms most of the surface rock. In consequence of this

feature, where the *Malakey* crops up near the ground, large tombs and *beers*, or underground cisterns, have been excavated in that softer stratum of rock, while the *Mizzey* has been left to form the natural roof. The huge rock-cut cisterns in the present Haram area, the site of the courts of the Temple, some of which are forty feet deep, afford a striking example of such excavations. The *Malakey* stratum has a depth of forty feet, and the *Mizzey* of seventy-one feet, in the immediate neighborhood of the city. Owing to the great depth to which the hard *Mizzey* rock descends, all attempts to sink the shaft of an artesian well near Jerusalem have hitherto been abandoned. I have said the *Mizzey* stone prevails upon the surface both in and around the city. The best evidence of this is offered by the fact, that in almost every instance when a man purchases a small plot of land, he finds enough of this stone to build, not only a house and enclosure wall founded upon their own native rock, but also the accompanying beer. I have had occasion to excavate much of the Mizzey upon my own grounds in Mount Gareb, and have good reason to know how exceedingly hard, difficult of clearage, and durable it is. Hence it was perfectly natural that Mount Zion should have been pre-eminently regarded from the earliest times

[1] Jeremiah 21:13, *tzoor pameeshoar*, "rock of the meeshoar," a Hebrew idiom for "the meeshoar rock." This word meeshoar means, "level down," or "tablehand." It is applied specially as a technical and local name to the smooth upland downs of Moab (Deuteronomy 3:10 ; Joshua 12:17, 20:8 ; Jeremiah xlviii. 8, 21). Hence, from the idea of a smooth, plain, lofty place, meeshoar came to have the secondary metaphorical sense of "equity," or "justice" (Psalm xlv. 6, lxvii. 4 ; Isaiah 1:4 ; Malachi 2:6). No doubt, in allusion to this meaning of the word, as well as to its being a level surface on the summit of hills, Jerusalem was proudly called by its inhabitants "the meeshoar rock. as "level or tableland rock,"[1] the natural, immovable, stone stronghold of Canaan's "everlasting hills."



SKETCH MAP OF JERUSALEM AND ITS ENVIRONS

1. The Protestant Cemetary. The black line to the northeast of it showing the position of the scarped foundation of the wall of Zion.
2. *Birket es Sultan*, or Sultan's Pool.
3. The traditional Aceldama.
4. *Birket Mamilla*.
5. The School of the late Anglican Bishop. (Now Jerusalem University College)

In a glance at the spot given us in the days of David, we learn that it was regarded from time immemorial as a place of such strength, owing to its steep, precipitous, rocky sides, as to be held impregnable — the Gibralter of Palestine fortresses. Josephus gives a detailed account of the magnificent natural position of the walls, towers, and fortification of the city of Herod at this point. His descriptions, which it has been so much the fashion in modern times to decry as enthusiastic and exaggerated, have throughout the work of the *Palestine Exploration Fund* been for

[2] The principal exception to this rule occurs in the case of his description of the town of Caesarea. If the ruins now supposed to represent this once important place are on the true site - and it appears to me that his has been by no means indisputably proved - they appear to contradict the magnificence which Josephus recounts.

[3] Josephus' *Wars of the Jews*, 5.4.3

the most part minutely confirmed.[2] This Jewish writer, who was engaged in a

leading capacity in the siege of Jerusalem under Titus, tells us that the first of the three enclosure walls ran round the summit of Mount Zion, that it was defended by sixty towers; and speaking of the three named Hippicus, Phasaelus, and Mariamne, he describes them as the wonder of all beholders on account of their great height, massive structure, and commanding position. Titus, who destroyed all else, left these as trophies of his splendid victory, to show the exceeding vastness and strength of the fortifications which had been reduced by the might of Rome. Josephus speaks of them as "for largeness, beauty, and strength, beyond all that were in the habitable earth." [3] "The largeness also of the stones," he says, "were wonderful, for they were not made of common small stones, nor of such large ones only as men could carry, but they were of white marble cut out of the rock (probably *Malakey*); each stone was twenty cubits in length (at least about twenty-seven feet), and ten in breadth, and five in depth. They were so exactly united to one another, that each tower looked like one entire rock of stone, so growing naturally, and afterwards cut by the hands of the artificers into present shape and corner; so little, or not at all, did their joints [4]Josephus' *Wars of the Jews*, 5.4.4 or connection appear." [4]

Quite recently, in the winter of 1874, Mr. Henry Maudslay, an English civil engineer, while making improvements in the school of the Anglican Bishop at Jerusalem on the southwest brow of Mount Zion, where it overlooks the pool now called the *Birket es Sultan*, was so fortunate as to fully explore and lay bare the ancient lie of the rock. Nothing could be grander than the huge natural fastness, which he was able to follow and display. The limestone crag proved to have been scarped, that is, cut smooth and straight as a wall, with infinite labour perpendicularly to the average height of thirty feet throughout the hundred and thirty yards explored on this occasion. The foundation of a mighty tower, a projecting scarp forty-five feet square, was discovered under the school-house, standing itself on a broad ledge of rock, below which another deep scarp appeared to exist. In one place, thirty-six steps were laid bare, cut in the face of the scarp ascending the base of a second smaller tower. The bases of three towers in all were examined, and a system of no less than eighteen beers, or cisterns, cut in the rock, which supplied them with water. It is exceedingly interesting to observe that both these "cistern to receive rain-water," and these "steps," are specially noted in connection with all the towers described by Josephus as
[5]Josephus' *Wars of the Jews*, 5.4.3 standing upon the three walls.[5] In one place

a ditch, some twenty feet wide, was found, with a rough rock slope below. On the western side were found at the foot of the scarp a number of fallen stones from three to four feet long, "many of which," says Lieutenant Conder, "seem to me to be Roman work, with a draft [6]See paper by Lieutenant Conder, R.E., in January *Quarterly Statement of Palestine Exploration Fund*, p. 7, and *April Quarterly Statement*, p. 18. This deeply interesting discovery has not yet received the attention it deserves. of three inches broad." He adds:[6] "The stones were found principally face downwards, as though fallen from the tower above, or pushed over from within." Here, then, in this modern glimpse at the famed fortress of Jebus, we see rock-cut faces rising perpendicularly in one place to the height of perhaps more than fifty feet. Well might David, rejoicing in the security of God's people, allude in enthusiastic language to these remarkable features as fitting symbols of the Divine protection , and to the awe with which they struck the minds of those monarchs who came to besiege the city when they first beheld them —

> "Beautiful for elevation, the joy of the whole earth,
> Is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north;
> The city of the great king.
>
> For lo, the kings were assembled,
> They marched on together.
> They beheld, and so they marvelled,
> They were troubled, they hasted away;
> Trembling took hold upon them there,
> Pain, as of a woman in travail.
>
> Walk about Zion, and go round about her,
> Count her towers;
> Mark ye well her bulwarks.
>
> For this God is our God for ever and ever,
> He will himself be our guide until [or, over] death."[7]

[7] Psalm xlviii. 2, 4-6, 12-14. The word I have translated "elevation," *noaph*, only occurs in this place. It is evidently derived from *nooph*, which has the sense of "to lift up," and hence, in a technical sense, "to wave," "to lift up and wave to and fro," a wave-offering, which is its meaning in twenty places. Five times it has the sense of "lifting up and striking with," as of a sickle or a tool (Exodus

20:25 ; Deuteronomy 23:25, 27:5 ; Joshua 8:31 ; Isaiah 10:15), and seven times of "lifting up and shaking the hand in a threatening manner" (Isaiah 10:32, 11:15, 13:2, 29:16 ; Zechariah 2:9 ; Job 31:21). The word here, therefore, is a very suggestive one, and seems to convey the idea, not only of an elevated place, lifted up on high, and offered as it were to God, but of one that defies it foes.

Undoubtedly the rock face I have described must have formed part of the adamantine foundations upon which afterwards rose the first or old wall. Once huge ramparts crowned this scarp, and on the square projecting bases Herod built massive towers of immense strength. No stone of these can now be pointed out. Lieutenant Conder, reviewing Mr. Maudslay's important exploration, says it is especially "valuable as showing that, however the masonry may hve been destroyed and lost, we may yet hope to find indications of the ancient enceinte in the rock scarps which are imperishable." This is very true; for, while man can destroy what man has made, the everlasting hills smile at his rage. Yet who can hear of it without perceiving the force and sublimity of that glorious description of the immobility of believers —

> "They that trust in Jehovah are as Mount Zion,
> Which shall not be moved, it abideth for ever."

Not less impressive is the comparison used to set forth their eternal security as safe-guarded by Jehovah Himself —

> "The mountains are round about Jerusalem;
> And Jehovah is round about his people,
> Henceforth, even for evermore."

The Holy City, on its seven closely-clustered but well-defined hills, is surrounded by deep narrow valleys, which make the ascent to the gates toilsome on every side but the north-west. Though the slopes ascending to the city on all sides are still steep, recent explorations have shown that in former times they were far more precipitous. The dêbris of the twenty-seven-times-sacked city lies upon them in one spot to the depth of 125 feet.[8] There now exists in England a [8] See *The Recovery of Jerusalem*, p. 187. A brief account of its twenty-seven sieges is given in *Our Work on Palestine* (Messrs. Bentley & Sons), pp. 48-66. deeply-interesting model of Jerusalem and its environs, exhibited by the Palestine Exploration Fund in the Science and Art Department

of the South Kensington Museum. This model gives us the true ancient lie of the ground in and around the city, being an embossed copy of the rock contours, made accurately to scale, the result of years of scientific survey and exploration, embodying the careful work of Col. Sir Charles Wilson, R.E., Col. Warren, R.E., Lieut. Conder, R.E., Mr. Schick of Jerusalem, and others. Here we look upon the true site of the city of David and Solomon, as it must have existed before its deep ravines and abrupt slopes were to a great extent buried and obliterated, as they are now, under vast heaps of rubbish. No engineer can glance at this model and doubt for a moment where the third or outer wall of the city must have stood, namely, on the brow of the natural ridge that runs, with a more or less steep descent, all round the city, except for some six hundred yards on the north-west. Now let any one follow with a measure this brow of the ridge, and he will find that it gives a circumference of four miles, just the thirty-three stadia that Josephus assigns to the outside limits of the city![9] It is strange that any doubt should [9]The whole compass of the city was thirty-three furlongs." - Josephus, *War of the Jews,* 5.4.3 ever have existed on this point, and yet in very few plans of the city is this line suggested.

If we bear in mind the position thus assigned, it adds much force to the figure under consideration. Jerusalem in ancient times was not only "beautiful for elevation," but also secure and strong, beyond most cities, on the same account. With its massive and lofty walls, resting for the greater part of four miles on the brow of rocky precipitous hills, it was entirely surrounded, except for a few hundred yards, by the nahhal, or torrent valley, of Kidron, on the north and east, and the gay, or ravine-like glen, of the son of Hinnom, or Gehenna, on the west and south. Beyond these rise the mountains of Scopus on the north, from which may be had the finest view of the city, and the Mount of Olivet, where it turns abruptly to the south. Olivet, after running for about three-quarters of a mile, slightly dips, and rises again in a separate hill called the Mount of Offence, where the village of Siloam, now Silwan, still clings to its steep sides, and where once upon its summit, towering high above the sanctuary of Jehovah, the idol temple of Solomon's heathen wives commanded the Holy City. The narrow vale of Gehenna along the west and south, one of the most verdant and picturesque in all the neighbourhood, is shut in by the present so-called Hill of Evil Counsel, a terraced ridge with bold limestone cliffs, honeycombed by excavated sepulchres, which in some parts rises to a considerable elevation. The mountains most emphatically stand "round about Jerusalem," and in doing so must have greatly safeguarded it in ancient times.

We are specially told that when Titus besieged the city, he found it impossible to invest it completely until he had built a wall round the entire sides of these mountains, nearly five miles long, with thirteen places at intervals in which he stationed garrisons, which added another mile and a quarter to these vast earthworks. "The whole was completed," says the Jewish historian, "in three days; so that what would naturally have required some months was done in so short an interval as is incredible."[10] Assaults upon the city, even then,

[10]Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 5.12.2

could only be delivered effectively upon its level corner to the north-west, whence every hostile advance was necessarily directed in all its various sieges. To those familiar with these facts, beautifully bold, graphic, and forceful is the Psalmist's figure of the security of the Lord's people —

[11] To some, accustomed to our use of the word "mountains," it has seemed that hills like Scopus, Olivet, and Mount of Offence, &c., closely clustering round the Holy City, are not lofty or large enough to be dignified with such a title, and these have been led to look for "the mountains round about Jerusalem" in the peak of Neby Samwil, some three and a half miles away, in the grand natural wall of Moab, rising up to a height of over 4000 feet from the Jordan valley, at a distance of 25 miles, and some other far-off but conspicuous elevations. We must, however, remember that the term har, "mountain," is given in Scripture to any comparatively large ridge, or collection of small hills, and to many such a hogs-back as Scopus or Olivet. The hill over Jericho, the modern Ain es Sultan, is called a har, or "mountain" (Joshua 2:16). Ebal and Gerizim are each called a har (Deuteronomy 11:29); Zion, which is overlooked by most of the hills which I have described as standing round it, is repeatedly spoken of as a har (2 Kings 29:31; Psalm 2:6, &c.); and Olivet itself is in one place actually called by this name (Zechariah 14:4). There can be, therefore, no doubt of the appropriateness and literal accuracy of speaking of Jerusalem as surrounded by "mountains" in the case of the hills in close proximity to its wall. These mountains, with their deep intervening glens, stand like vast earthworks and fosses - a natural fortification - around the Holy City. Distant heights both afford no marked protection to Zion, and fail to convey any sense of that nearness and immediatecy of the Divine presence and power which the Psalmist seems to be expressing.

"The mountains are round about Jerusalem;
And Jehovah is round about his people,
Henceforth, even for evermore."[11]

These words must have sounded in Hebrew ears as sublime as they were comforting, and, when sung on the heights of Zion, inspiring in the last degree.

Jerusalem may indeed fitly stand as an image of the believing and ever-tried people of God. Its history, like that of the Church militant, has been one of continual warfare. It has been well remarked by Mr. Grove, in summing up the annals of the city, that while our first glimpse of it in the Old Testament tells how the children of Judah "smote it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire," so "almost the latest mention of it in the New Testament is contained in the solemn warnings in which Christ foretold how Jerusalem should be compassed with armies."(Judges 1:8; Luke 21:20. See article on Jerusalem in *Smith's Bible Dictionary*.) Twenty-seven times the waves of wild Eastern war have beaten upon its embattled walls. It has a story of trial and suffering without a parallel in the history of any other spot. Yet it still remains a city of some thirty thousand inhabitants, surrounded by lofty and picturesque walls, and we know from the prophetic word that it is finally to enjoy a never-ending future of peace and glory. But before the arrival of this happy time a last terrible trial of unexampled severity awaits Jerusalem, namely, that foretold by our Saviour, and plainly predicted in so many passages of the prophets.(Matthew 24. ;Luke 21; Isaiah 51:17-23 ; 59:1-18; Ezekiel 20:32-21/27; Joel 2; Zephaniah 1) The Jewish population of the city has doubled in recent years, and events now rapidly ripening are preparing the way for Israel's return to the Holy Land as a nation, while yet in unbelief. This temporary solution of the Eastern Question is to be looked for at any moment. But what will happen when God, thus working by the political necessities of the times, causes them to return to the land that He gave to their fathers? Let Jeremiah answer —

"Alas! For that day is great,
So that none is like it:
It is even the time of Jacob's trouble."Jeremiah 33:3-7

Daniel, speaking of "the time of the end," when he represents Israel as seen in their own land, suffering a fearful and overwhelming invasion at the hands of

the King of the North, declares of that siege of Jerusalem, "there shall be a time of distress, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time."(Daniel 12:1) Zechariah, foretelling the closing scenes of this dispensation, as we learn from the following verses, says in the name of the Lord, "I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity."(Zechariah 24:2)

To quote from the author's Palestine Repeopled. "In the twenty-second chapter of Ezekiel, we have a dark picture of Israel's impiety, followed by a threatening of their long dispersion: 'I will scatter thee among the heathen, and disperse thee in the countries, and will consume thy filthiness out of thee!' But even this long discipline will not be sufficient, therefore we read in the following verses. — 'Because ye all become dross, behold, therefore, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and copper, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it, so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will lay you on, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof. And ye shall know that I, Jehovah, have poured out my fury upon you.'" These terrible
Ezekiel 22:19-22 final judgments are to be correctional. The Lord "doth not willingly afflict and grieve the children of men," and in the issue we learn that the coming sorrows of the Jewish people are to be blessed of God to their conversion, and their restoration to the Divine favour. In view, however, of this time of Jacob's trouble, the last and worst of eighteen centuries of suffering, it will be seen at once how these very mountains, which served to make Jerusalem secure before the days of cannon, will only add so many new terrors to the siege of the future!

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